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MESHING MEDICINE WITH MICROBIOLOGY

By Barbara McBreen

STANDING CENTER STAGE UNDER THE DOME OF IOWA'S Capitol in Des Moines, Jennifer Blaser spoke to a crowd of more than 100 about the importance of student research.

"Undergraduate research is an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, investigate diverse career paths and hone research skills," Blaser says.

At the Iowa Regent Universities Fifth Annual Research in the Capitol, Blaser, a junior in microbiology, was chosen as the student speaker for the event held in March. She was one of the 60 students showcasing research results during a poster presentation. Blaser's research focused on her summer internship at the University of Michigan Cardiovascular Center and Department of Pharmacology.

"We looked at a bacterial cocaine esterase, which is an enzyme, and hypothesized that it would cleave the cocaine molecule and make it biologically inactive, thus protecting the heart," Blaser says. "It's a potential therapy for cocaine overdose."

As president of the Microbiology Club, she helped organize a field day last fall for 60 high school students to come to campus and learn about microbiology.

At the field day students studied laboratory techniques, diagnostic testing and microscopy. Blaser says the goal is to get more students interested in science-based careers.

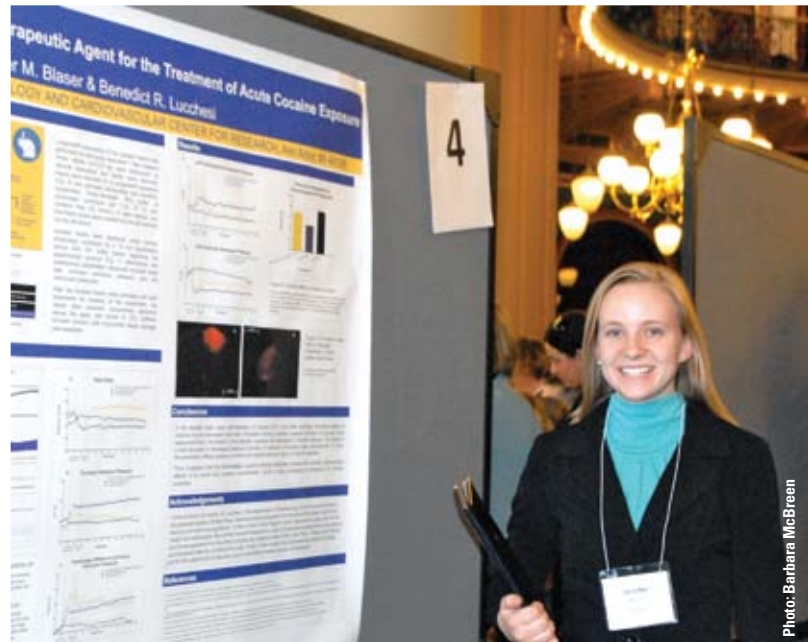


Photo: Barbara McBreen

Jennifer Blaser was one of 60 students showcasing their research at the recent Iowa Regent Universities Fifth Annual Research in the Capitol event. She also shared her passion for undergraduate research as the selected student presenter.

"WE WANT TO OPEN STUDENTS' MINDS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF PURSUING A CAREER IN THE SCIENCES."

"We want to open students' minds to the possibility of pursuing a career in the sciences," Blaser says.

At an open house during this spring's Veishea celebration, the Microbiology Club enticed visitors to walk through a giant

bacterial cell or purchase a stuffed microbe. Blaser says the open house is another opportunity to educate prospective students and parents.

Blaser, who plans to become a doctor, is not new to the medical field. In high school she traveled to Belize on a mission trip with her father, who is a physician. There she served as a pharmacy technician. She also went to Costa Rica and Nicaragua on an international service trip where she helped diagnose patients under a doctor's supervision.

During the past year she's served as vice president of membership for the Alpha Phi Omega National Service Organization, vice president of selections for Cardinal Key Honorary and vice president of the Pre-medical Club. She also promotes Iowa State as an admissions representative and takes prospective students and parents on campus tours.

"It's all volunteer and we are all passionate about showing off the Iowa State campus," Blaser says.

Blaser understands the importance of a campus visit. It's one of the reasons she chose Iowa State. She says the campus was much larger than her high school, but people on campus were friendly and welcoming. And, she says, it's been a perfect fit.


"Iowa State has given me more than I could possibly have imagined through the numerous opportunities to succeed in academics, service and leadership," Blaser says. 



Photo: Barbara McBreen

As president of the Microbiology Club, Jennifer Blaser helps sell stuffed microbes at the 2010 Veishea microbiology open house. She jokes you can give someone a soft, cuddly bug instead of the real thing.